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AUTHOR Andresen, Earl R.
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ABSTRACT

Seventy-six deans from state supported regional colleges in Louisiana, Texas, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were selected for a study which showed that academic deans from different disciplines (College of Education and College of Arts and Sciences) perceive and have different expectations of the institution's public relations administrator. The study also resulted in recommendations for a sound public relations program that is administered by an appropriate individual. Survey responses (n=58) revealed that the deans from the colleges of education are: more concerned with the public relations administrator's credentials, not as concerned with the administrator's academic discipline, and believe the administrator requires some private sector experience as well as a teaching background. Deans from Arts and Sciences disagreed with the intensity of the requirements of the Deans of the Colleges of Education except in the matter of an administrator having some private sector experience. It is recommended that in order to satisfy both types of deans a prospective public relations administrator should possess an advanced degree, preferably a doctorate; have private sector experience; possess degrees in communications, preferably journalism; and have some teaching experience. Contains the survey instrument and two references. (GLR)

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RELATIONS ADMINISTRATOR IN HIGHER
EDUCATION BY ACADEMIC DEANS IN
THE COLLEGES OF EDUCATION AND
ARTS AND SCIENCES:
COMPARISONS AND CONTRASTS

Earl R. Andresen

University of Oklahoma

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Earl R. Andresen, Ph.D.
University of Oklahoma
School of Journalism and
Mass Communication
Norman, Oklahoma 73019

ABSTRACT 1990

The study deals with the working perceptions of academic deans in the colleges of education and arts and sciences and that of the public relations administrator in the university in which they are employed. This survey queried 76 deans at regional universities in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Louisiana and Texas.

58 universities reported back, and all 58 instruments were deemed valid by the researcher. The results were compared and contrasted, and a number of significant differences occurred, along with many similarities.

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The tremendous expansion of public relations in the past 75 years is attributed to the world's development of complex societies, new communications technologies, and the increase in literacy.

Higher education has had a major impact in providing the world with increased awareness of everything. Institutions have a responsibility of maintaining complete and well grounded public relations activities, because of the vast number of constituents they serve.

THE PROBLEM

Statement of the problem. It is the purpose of this study (1) to show that academic deans from different disciplines perceive and have different expectations of the institution's public relations administrator; (2) to make suggestions for a

sound public relations program that is administrated by an appropriate individual.

Importance of the Study. The study reviews the attitudes of deans from the Colleges of Education and the Colleges of Arts and Sciences toward public relations at their respective institutions. The comparisons and contrasts are alarming, and suggest that many deans do not understand the realities of public relations in higher education.

DEFINITION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The general practice of public relations, unlike the fields of medicine, law, education, or any other profession, is by and large new. The general function from institution to institution or organization to organization is also varied. What this means is that there are a vast number of definitions for public relations. There is no one true definition for public relations.

Edward L. Bernays (1952), who is considered the father of academic public relations, stated that he used three meanings to describe public relations: (1) information given to the public, (2) persuasion directed at the public to modify attitudes and actions, and (3) efforts to integrate attitudes and actions of an institution with its publics and of publics with that institution (p. 3).

Higher education administrators and managers are often confronted with public relations activities. Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985), believe that the university president's role is one of total public relations. "The patriarchial college president is gone...Today's president must lead---not direct---faculties, students, and governing boards. Today's president or chancellor is caught in the crunch of conflicting values and demands from constituent-claimant publics" (p. 634). They also point out that university administrators have been compelled to move from talking about the need for communication to actually communicating with their publics (p. 635).

The college public relations office has many functions. The office acts as the liaison with the press, and is often responsible for the news bureau on campus, and in some cases is also in-charge of the sports information area. In addition, the public relations office may include control of alumni affairs,

as well as, the development operation. The office may also have the responsibility of all external publications, including the newspaper and yearbook. It depends on the institution, but in many cases the public relations office has a myriad of responsibilities.

The college or university public relations office function, and the public relations administrator's position is often misunderstood even by other administrators at their institutions. Because of this possible misunderstanding a review study was called for.

THE PURPOSE

The purpose of the study is to determine whether there are significant differences between the perceptions of selected academic deans in the Colleges of Education, and the Colleges of Arts and Sciences, and the public relations administrator at their institution.

The study will also seek:

(1) to determine whether there are significant differences in the perceptions of selected higher education public relations directors with various levels of education with regard to the role of the public relations administrator.

(2) to determine whether there are significant differences in the perceptions of selected higher education public relations directors with various levels of experience with regard to the role of the public relations administrator.

(3) to determine whether there are significant differences in the perceptions of selected higher education public relations directors with various amounts of teaching experience with regard to the role of the public relations administrator.

(4) to determine whether there are significant differences in the perceptions of selected higher education public relations directors with various amounts of private sector public relations experience with regard to the role of the public relations administrator.

(5) to determine whether there are significant differences in the perceptions of selected higher education public relations directors with specific academic credentials with regard to the role of the public relations administrator.

METHODOLOGY

The population studied were academic deans from the colleges of education, and arts and sciences.

Four states were selected for the study, two in the upper midwest, Wisconsin and Minnesota, and two from the southwest,

Louisiana and Texas. State supported institutions were selected for review, regional schools only, and not the large land grant or flagship institutions.

The sample consisted of 76 deans, their names and addresses were acquired from recent college bulletins, and Peterson's Graduate Programs in the Humanities & Social Sciences.

A questionnaire was developed for the collection of data (figure 1). The first part of the questionnaire consisted of questions about the respondent's responsibilities and his/her feelings regarding the role of public relations at the institution where they were employed. The second part of the questionnaire concerned the public relations administrator, and the specific responsibility or knowledge of that person regarding public relations. The third part of the questionnaire was concerned with perceptions of responsibility of the public relations administrator by the dean, and perceptions of what a public relations administrator should or should not have as experience, whether it is academic or professional.

RESULTS OF STUDY

In April 1989, 76 instruments were sent out to the academic deans in the two specific colleges mentioned in the methodology. 58 deans returned the questionnaires. All were valid, and in good order, 18 were not returned (Figure 2). The breakdown between the two colleges was 18 returned from arts and sciences, and 40 returned from education (Graph 1).

Public Relations Questionnaire

7.

FIGURE 1

Public Relations Questionnaire for Deans

Public relations the planned effort to influence opinion through good character and responsible performance, based upon mutually satisfactory two-way communications. Scott M. Cutlip

1. Is public relations an important part of your administrative duties?

Very Important (please circle) Not Important at all
5 4 3 2 1

2. Does your CEO have a good understanding of public relations?

Very Understanding (please circle) Does not understand
5 4 3 2 1

3. Does your institution have a specific public relations administrator? Yes No (please circle)

4. Is the public relations administrator knowledgeable in public relations?

Very Knowledgeable (please circle) Not Knowledgeable
5 4 3 2 1

5. If your institution has a public relations administrator, does that person have specific public relations experience?

Yes No (please circle)

6. What is the highest earned degree of the public relations administrator? (please circle)

a: Bachelor's b: Master's
c: Doctoral d: other

7. What earned degree do you feel should be the minimum requirement for a public relations administrator?

a: Not important to have a degree
b: Bachelor's
c: Master's
d: Doctoral
e: other (please explain)

8. What specific academic discipline should the public relations administrator have for a background?

9. Should the public relations administrator have been a teaching professor sometime in his/her career? Yes No (please circle)

10. Should the public relations administrator have worked in public relations in the private sector sometime in his/her career?

Yes No Not Important (please circle)

FIGURE 2

8.

Instrument Return Rate State by State

Combined Colleges of Arts & Sciences
and
Colleges of Education

76 Instruments sent out in April

58 Deans responded to the questionnaires

18 Deans did not respond

Minnesota:	10 sent	4 returned	40% response rate
Wisconsin:	18 sent	14 returned	78% response rate
Louisiana:	19 sent	16 returned	84% response rate
Texas:	29 sent	24 returned	83% response rate

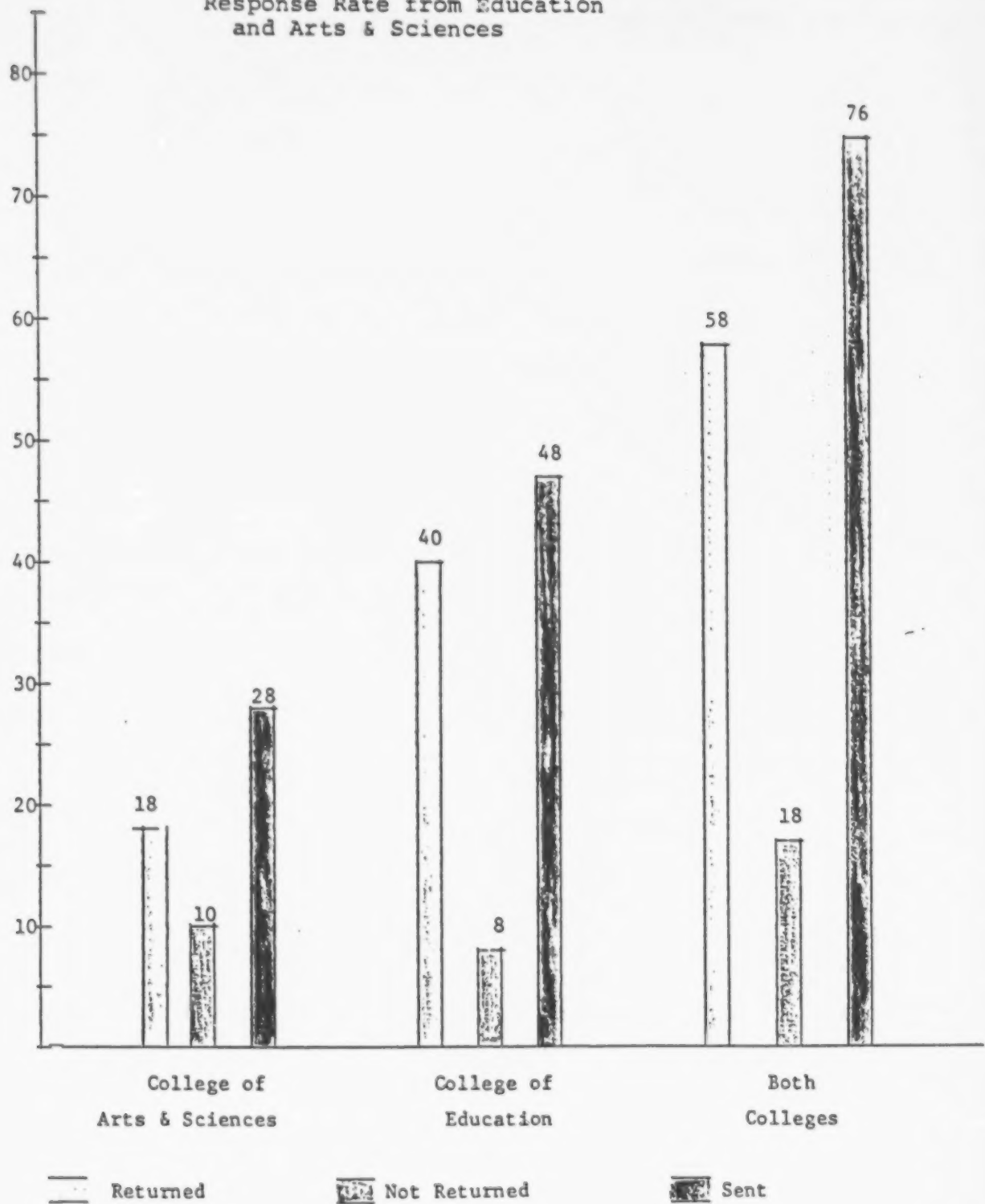
The total response rate for the four
states was: 76.3%*

* All instruments that were returned were useable

GRAPH # 1

9.

Response Rate from Education
and Arts & Sciences



The response rate was much better from a percentage point from the deans of Colleges of Education (Figure 3), than from the deans of Colleges of Arts and Sciences (Figure 4). It is interesting to note that the deans from both colleges in Louisiana and Texas were more responsive than the deans from both colleges in Wisconsin and Minnesota (Figures 3 and 4).

The data collected for questions 1, 2 and 4 was measured on a 1 to 5 Likert Scale, with five (5) being the highest and one (1) the lowest. Table 1 (p. 26) was for the College of Education, and presents the reader the results of the data collected. Table 2 (p. 28) was for the College of Arts and Sciences, and presents the results of the data collection.

In question 1, there is .55 difference between the deans of the two colleges regarding the importance of public relations in their jobs. The deans in the Colleges of Education feel that they do more public relations work than do the deans in the Colleges of Arts and Sciences.

Questions 2, 3 and 4 were background information questions that dealt with the president and the institution's public relations administrator. It is interesting to note that 18 of the 58 responding deans said that there was "no" specific public relations administrator at their institution. There is a specific public relations administrator at all the surveyed institutions. It is a baffling response.

Question 5 suggests that the deans in both colleges know that the public relations administrator has specific public relations experience.

Figure 3

Frequency of Submissions by State

Colleges of Education

48 Instruments sent out in April

40 Deans responded to the questionnaires

8 Deans did not respond to the
questionnaires

Minnesota:	6	sent	4	returned	66% response rate
Wisconsin:	14	sent	12	returned	86% response rate
Louisiana:	16	sent	16	returned	100% response rate
Texas:	12	sent	8	returned	66% response rate

The total response rate for the four states

was: 83%

Figure 4

12.

Frequency of Submissions by State

Colleges of Arts and Sciences

28 Instruments sent out in April

18 Deans responded to the questionnaires

10 Deans did not respond to the
questionnaires

Minnesota:	4 sent	0 returned	0% response rate
Wisconsin:	4 sent	2 returned	50% response rate
Louisiana:	3 sent	0 returned	0% response rate
Texas:	17 sent	16 returned	94% response rate

The total response rate for the four states
was: 64%

Question 6 addresses the educational level of the public relations administrator at the dean's institution.

Question 7 response suggests that the deans from the two colleges have varying opinions regarding the minimum requirements, i.e., academic credentials, for a public relations administrator in higher education. The deans from the Colleges of Education want a more academic person, a person with degreed training. Six of the deans wanted, or at least thought it would be a good idea for the public relations administrator to have a doctorate. None of the deans from the Colleges of Education felt that the doctorate was that important. 80% of the education deans thought the master's degree or higher was appropriate. On the other hand, only 38% of the deans from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences felt that the master's or higher would be appropriate for the public relations administrator.

In question 8 it was found that 44% of the deans from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences wanted the public relations administrator to have an academic background in communications. The education deans compared at 25%. The education deans number one choice was "any degree/not important" and that was 40%.

In question 9 it was found that the deans from the College of Education would have liked the public relations administrator to have been a teacher at sometime in his/her

career with 55%; the deans from the Colleges of Arts and Sciences did not feel that it was that important as only 22% agreed.

Question 10 was about equal in response, and there was no significant difference between the two sets of college deans. Both felt it would be a good idea if the public relations administrator had had public relations experience in the private sector.

The results of the ten questions is in Table 1 (pp. 15-16) for the College of Education deans, and in Table 2 (pp.17-18) for the College of Arts and Sciences deans.

College of Education Questionnaire Response

TABLE 1

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE RATE BASED ON A LIKERT SCALE 5 to 1 (5 highest)

QUESTIONS ASKED ON INSTRUMENT	RESPONSE					(HIGHEST to LOWEST)	AVERAGE
1. Is public relations an important part of your administrative duties?	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>		
	130	40	12	0	0	182	<u>4.55</u>
	26	10	4	0	0	40 Respondents	
2. Does your CEO have a good understanding of public relations?	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>		
	120	48	6	0	2	176	<u>4.40</u>
	24	12	2	0	2	40 Respondents	
3. Does your institution have a specific public relations administrator?	<u>Yes</u>	24	<u>No</u>	16		Total:	40
4. Is the public relations administrator knowledgeable in public relations?	<u>5</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>		
	30	56	6	4	0	96	<u>4.00</u>
	6	14	2	2	0	24 Respondents	
5. If your institution has a public relations administrator, does that person have specific public relations experience?	<u>Yes</u>	24	<u>No</u>	0		24 Respondents	
6. What is the highest earned degree of the public relations administrator?	Bachelor's	6		Doctoral	4		
	Master's	14		other	0	24 Total	
7. What earned degree do you feel should be the minimum requirement for a public relations administrator?	a: Not important to have a degree	2	5%				
	b: Bachelor's	6	15%				
	c: Master's	26	65%				
	d: Doctorate	6	15%				
	e: other	0	0%	40 Total			

TABLE 1 Continued ...

8. What specific academic discipline should the public relations administrator have for a background?	No response	8	20%	
	Journalism/PR/Communication	10	25%	
	Any degree/not important	16	40%	
	Business	4	10%	
	English	2	5%	40 Total
9. Should the public relations administrator have been a teaching professor sometime in his/her career?	<u>Yes</u>	22	55%	
	<u>No</u>	18	45%	40 Total
10. Should the public relations administrator have worked in public relations in the private sector sometime in his/her career?	<u>Yes</u>	22	55%	
	<u>No</u>	2	5%	
	<u>Not</u>	16	40%	40 Total
	<u>Important</u>			

College of Arts and Sciences Questionnaire Response

TABLE 2

COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES

QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONSE RATE BASED ON A LIKERT SCALE 5 to 1 (5 highest)

QUESTIONS ASKED ON INSTRUMENT	RESPONSE					(HIGHEST to LOWEST)	AVERAGE
1. Is public relations an important part of your administrative duties?	<u>5</u> 30	<u>4</u> 24	<u>3</u> 18	<u>2</u> 0	<u>1</u> 0	72	<u>4.00</u>
	6	6	6	0	0	18 Respondents	
2. Does your CEO have a good understanding of public relations?	<u>5</u> 40	<u>4</u> 24	<u>3</u> 12	<u>2</u> 0	<u>1</u> 0	76	<u>4.22</u>
	8	6	4	0	0	18 Respondents	
3. Does your institution have a specific public relations administrator?	<u>Yes</u> 16	<u>No</u> 2				18 Total	
4. Is the public relations administrator knowledgeable in public relations?	<u>5</u> 0	<u>4</u> 16	<u>3</u> 36	<u>2</u> 0	<u>1</u> 0	52	<u>3.25</u>
	0	4	12	0	0	16 Respondents	
5. If your institution has a public relations administrator, does that person have specific public relations experience?	<u>Yes</u> 8	<u>No</u> 2	<u>No Response</u> 8			18 Respondents	
6. What is the highest earned degree of the public relations administrator?	a: Bachelor's 10	b: Master's 2	c: Doctoral 1	d: other 0		13 Total	
7. What earned degree do you feel should be the minimum requirement for a public relations administrator?	a: Not important to have a degree 1 5%	b: Bachelor's 10 55%	c: Master's 6 33%	d: Doctorate 0 0%	e: other (law) 1 5%	18 Total	

TABLE 2 Continued...

8. What specific academic discipline should the public relations administrator have for a background?	No response	4	22%	
	Journalism/PR/Communications	8	44%	
	Any degree/not important	4	22%	
	Business/Marketing	2	12%	18 Total
9. Should the public relations administrator have been a teaching professor sometime in his/her career?	<u>Yes</u>	4	22%	
	<u>No</u>	14	78%	18 Total
10. Should the public relations administrator have worked in public relations in the private sector sometime in his/her career?	<u>Yes</u>	12	66%	
	<u>No</u>	2	12%	
	<u>Not Important</u>	4	22%	18 Total

Note: All response instruments were coded for return evaluation. The reviewer knew who returned the instruments, and who did not.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research on public relations administrators and how deans from two different colleges feel about them is interesting. The findings indicate that the deans from the colleges of education are more academically and degree oriented, and seem to appreciate credentials much more than do the deans from the colleges of arts and sciences. On the other hand, the deans from arts and sciences are much more concerned with the academic discipline background of the public relations administrator, and would like that person to have a communications background with journalism being the major discipline. The education dean is not as concerned with the academic discipline background of the public relations administrator. It is interesting to note, however, that both deans want the public relations administrator to have some professional experience in the private sector to go along with the credentials. Teaching background is of limited importance for the arts and sciences deans, but seems to carry significant weight for the education dean.

The research indicates that to satisfy both deans in the College of Education and the College of Arts and Sciences, an university public relations administrator must have experience in the private sector; both deans expect that. An advanced degree is a must, and it appears that a doctorate could help the cause. The academic discipline background would best be served if the

administrator's degrees were in communications, with journalism getting the nod. It is suggested that the PR administrator have acquired some teaching experience. The arts and sciences deans are not too concerned about teaching experience, but the deans from education consider it almost a must.

In reviewing the perception factors between the two sets of deans it was found that there was a significant difference in attitudes regarding the role of the public relations administrator. There is a major difference in academic training requirements, teaching experience, degrees held, and academic experience.

In summary, this exploratory research generated hypotheses about the overall as well as the specific requirements of the public relations administrator at a college or university, and the academic relationship of that position with deans from the College of Education, and the deans from the College of Arts and Sciences. Future research could look at the relationships between deans from other colleges to see if they have the same like concerns of the two sets of deans that have just been studied. 2) Whether or not the same factors that influence decision making in the tested deans will influence others. 3) If the same factors hold true for a complete set of new researched deans (different colleges). Drawing from this kind of research as well as from other input data, this research area could develop guidelines for the possible

selection procedures for the public relations administrator positions at the college and university levels. The ability to know what is important in the operations of an institution of higher education is of major significance.

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